

CLAIMS:

1. A method of searching in a set of objects a predetermined number of objects that are closest to an example, by utilizing a multilevel partition which has a tree-like structure comprising node¹ and leaves, the nodes containing elements representing classes of objects, and the leaves containing objects, said method comprising the execution of the following steps in a repetitive manner:

- a step of passing through said tree-like structure starting from a node and going to the leaves by passing through the nodes whose representative elements are closest to the example, for selecting one or various leaves;
- a step of testing whether the number of selected leaves is lower than said predetermined number of objects; and
- and, if the number of selected leaves is lower than said predetermined number of objects, a new repetition of said steps starting from the brother node of the node passed through last, closest to said example.

2. A search method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the predetermined number of objects is a multiple of a predetermined number of results, which method comprises an additional selection step for retaining from the selected leaves only a number of leaves equal to said predetermined number of results, the retained leaves being those that contain the objects closest to said example.

3. A search method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the step of passing through the tree-like structure comprises a test for verifying for each node passed through if the number of leaves connected to this node is lower than or equal to the number of objects to be selected, in which case the leaves connected to this node are selected directly without passing by any possible intermediate nodes.

4. A search method as claimed in one of the claims 1 or 2, characterized in that said objects are descriptions of video shots.

5. A search method as claimed in one of the claims 1 or 2, characterized in that said objects are MPEG-7 descriptions.

6. A search method as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that the proximity of the representative elements or objects to the example searched for is determined by using a measure of similarity f which is the one that has been used for constructing the partition used and which verifies the following properties:

- f is an application which associates a real number with two data of the initial set;
- this real number is identical whatever the order of the two data; and
- the real number associated with two identical data is higher than the real number associated with two different data.

7. A program comprising instructions for implementing a search method as claimed in one of the claims 1 or 2, when it is executed by a processor.

8. Equipment comprising means for implementing a search method as claimed in one of the claims 1 or 2.

9. A transmission system comprising at least equipment as claimed in claim 8.

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